

PARKS AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
OF THE
SUFFOLK COUNTY LEGISLATURE
Minutes

A regular meeting of the Parks and Cultural Affairs Committee of the Suffolk County Legislature was held in the Rose Y. Caracappa Legislative Auditorium of the William H. Rogers Legislature Building, 725 Veterans Memorial Highway, Smithtown, New York on February 1, 2006.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Leg. Lynne C. Nowick, Chairperson
Leg. Vivian Vilorio•Fisher, Vice•Chairperson
Leg. Kate M. Browning
Leg. Jon Cooper
Leg. Cameron Alden

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

George Nolan, Counsel to the Legislature
Ian Barry, Assistant Counsel
Richard K. Baker, Deputy Clerk
Ginny Suhr, Aide to Leg. Vilorio•Fisher
Ronald F. Foley, Commissioner of Parks

Ben Zwirn, Assistant Deputy County Executive
Paul Perillie, Aide to Minority Caucus
Vito Minei, Director of Division of Environmental Quality
Warren Greene, Aide to Leg. Alden
Barbara LoMoriello, PO's Office
Commissioner Ronald Foley, Parks Department
Ray Corwin, Suffolk County Parks Trustee
Greg Dawson, SCPT
John Fritz, SCPT
Miles Borden, SCPT
Dick White, SCPT
Jill Moss, Budget Review Office

MINUTES TAKEN BY:

Diana Kraus • Court Stenographer

MINUTES TRANSCRIBED BY:

Alison Mahoney • Court Stenographer

(THE MEETING COMMENCED AT 11:44 AM)

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

I would like to call this meeting to order. I'd like to start with the Pledge of Allegiance led by the Honorable Vivian Vilorio•Fisher.

(SALUTATION)

LEG. VILORIA•FISHER:

Madam Chair, I know we're way delayed, but I would like to take a moment in memory of Corretta Scott King who died yesterday. If we could just have a moment of silence for this person who gave such dignity and such great respect and love for a very important cause in our country.

(MOMENT OF SILENCE OBSERVED)

Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Good morning, everybody. And I do apologize for the delay. We did have a committee meeting that did run way over its time, but it was an important meeting.

Today we do not have a large agenda and I don't see any yellow cards, but I have invited the members of the Trustees of the Parks, Recreation and Conservation Board. So maybe we could start with all of them, maybe you would like to come up and sit with us. I thought it would be a good opportunity to get acquainted and perhaps if all of you had any •• you can come on up.

Good morning. I thought maybe this is a good opportunity, if you all wanted to introduce yourselves, if you do have any concerns and you want to address the committee, or vice versa, with the committee to the trustees, I thought this would be a good opportunity. And if we want, we can start over here, if you could just speak into the microphone, introduce yourselves and just go right down the row.

MR. WHITE:

Dick White, Town of East Hampton.

MR. BORDEN:

Miles Borden, Town of Smithtown.

MR. FRITZ:

John Fritz, Town of Babylon.

MR. CORWIN:

Ray Corwin, Trustee•at•Large.

MR. DAWSON;

Good morning. Greg Dawson, Town of Islip.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

There was somebody else I thought; no, okay.

All right, I wanted to thank all of you for serving as Trustees. I know it takes lot of your time. And again, I apologize for the delay for the 45 minutes that you had to wait, but it was an important meeting.

I'd like to also take this opportunity now to thank my representative. Miles, thank you so much for giving me a synopsis when you go to meetings and you do let me know what's going on. I find that very valuable, and I do appreciate your taking the time to do that. I know you are enjoying what you're doing and I know that for me it helps, at least I get a synopsis.

Well, we can start. If you have any questions, I'm going to start from left to right, if you have anything that you would like to bring up. Oh, is this your spokesman right here?

MR. FRITZ:

He's the Chairman.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Okay, maybe you would like to start with us.

MR. CORWIN:

Thank you, Legislator Nowick. What we'd like to do is just •• I'd like to go down some of the items that the Trustees have traditionally dealt with. I promised my Trustees, as I always do at the meetings, to be as brief as possible. And I'd like then for each of my four colleagues that are here today to add their two or three cents worth as they see fit.

Some of you are familiar with the work of the trustees, some of you may not be as familiar. And first I just wanted to invite all of you to attend the trustee meetings whenever possible. I believe that the mailings go out to all the Legislators, I think that's still the case, and I know in the past we've had very good attendance from many of you. Certainly those of you that have

been on the Legislature for a years have, at some point or another, attended one or more trustee meetings and we, in turn, are going to be trying to attend as many as the Parks Committee meetings as possible.

I just became Chair for my second tenure. I was chair a few years ago for a couple of years and during that time I tried to attend as many of the Parks Committee meetings as possible. I shall continue to do that to the extent that my work schedule permits me to do that, and when I can't I'll try to have other members of the board attend.

What I'd like to do here is just go down some of the items that I've listed in a handout that we compiled. And the purpose of the hand•out is not just to give you something in writing, although that's valuable, it's also to make you familiar with some of the major issues that occupy the time of the Trustees at our meetings. And I'll just start very briefly with an overview. And if you know some of this, my apologies but I think it's basic information.

There are 13 trustees, one for each of the ten towns. There's one Trustee •at•Large, which is myself at present. And there are two trustees, one from the County government, one representing the County Executive's Office, an appointee of the County Exec, and one representing the Presiding Officer of the Legislature. Some years ago, by the way, we had encountered the problem that we were lacking a bit of communication between the Legislative Branch, the Executive Branch and the Trustees. And we simply looked at the Charter and realized that there was a Presiding Officer and a County Executive representative that just had never been filled; as near as we could tell, the records show they had never been filled. So we made an outreach to those two offices and I'm pleased to say now, I think a lot of our decisions are better informed about the perspectives •• by the perspectives of those two other branches of government when we review acquisitions or review park policies or budgets.

The primary purpose of the trustees is to provide some oversight and some balanced point of view to the decisions that the Legislature, the County, the County parks staff, especially the Commissioner •• and I want to thank Commissioner Foley for all the efforts that he puts in to supporting the trustees •• on acquisitions, park policy, capital budgets. And often our

discussions are site specific. There may be a particular parcel that's proposed for acquisition under a particular program. A lot of times our policy decisions emanate from a specific parcel and turn into a more general issue. It might be an issue of public access on one parcel that's being proposed for acquisition and that makes us pause to look back on what we have or have not done in the past on insisting public access provisions be put into other parcels. And that is, in essence, how some of the major issues that you see listed here have evolved to the level of discussion that they have.

We also try to work very closely •• and there's actually a separate bullet towards the end of that hand•out on •• we try to work very closely with all the branches of government. The Trustees, although we try to bring a historical perspective, we have trustees going back to the 70's and trustees that are brand new, so there's a continuity, there's a historical continuity among the trustees on knowledge of what's happened in the Parks Department, what's worked, what hasn't worked. But we realize that the Trustees don't have •• certainly we don't have a corner of knowledge of the parks. There's the County Legislature, the County Executive's Office, very importantly there's the County Planning Department and the County Parks Department. When you look at the extensive work that those two •• those latter two have done over the years, Suffolk County Planning has a Park Policy Master Plan which is a voluminous, and I do mean a voluminous but very informative document that we turn to. I think sometimes I turn to it maybe more often than my fellow Trustees would necessarily like because I just want to know what the County Planning Department, back when a particular parcel was not under the spotlight, thought about the uses of that parcel, thought about the importance of it, how it was acquired.

And a lot of times the knowledge that we find within the staff of the Parks Department is just enormous. I mean, there is an institutional history in the Suffolk County Parks Department that is I dare say second to none in any of the County agencies that the County has on the roles. It is •• there are literally hundreds and hundreds of years of experience and everything from the interaction with the citizen on the street or at the gate to what happened under a prior Commissioner or what happened under a prior Legislature or why a particular issue did or didn't rise to the level of having a resolution

passed. A lot of times you won't find it written down why something is the way it is, and we try to approach things with the understanding that there's nothing special about the present except that it's a continuation of where we've been in the past and we try to make intelligent decisions in recommending actions to the Legislature or the Commissioner.

The trustee's role in land acquisition varies greatly with the number of acquisition programs, and I wouldn't even attempt to go through those at the moment. There's actually a handbook that Suffolk County Planning has put out that details each of the acquisition programs and I suspect that you've probably all received it or seen it. It's about two years old and we often turn to that as a guideline. There are some cases where the Trustee's approval is required. There are some cases where it's simply required that a recommendation come from the Trustees, sometimes it's an evaluation or a ranking and sometimes it's not obligatory to run something by the Trustees, but another party will do that, maybe a Legislator, maybe the County Exec, maybe the Commissioner.

One of the items that I put on your handout is simply entitled Park Planning. And I've covered a couple of these. But running through all of the planning is the idea that we need to have a stable policy, that we need to look forward and into the future and try to not only address the instant questions that vex the Commissioner or the Legislature, but also to look forward to what's a stable policy, what has to be a customized policy on a particular parcel and what has to be •• what can be a more general policy.

One of the areas that we're very sensitive to is the area of fair and equal access to the parks. Not everyone goes to the parks for the same reason. That's like stating the obvious; I mean, there's people who like to golf, there's people who like to go to the marina, there's people who go to the beach, there's people who go every week and people who go maybe once a year. There's people of every economic spectrum. So there's a diversity of citizens, and I'm again stating the obvious, out there that the Parks Department intends to serve. You simply look at the title, Parks, Recreation and Conservation, and you might as well add historic preservation in that because each of these falls under the bailiwick of the Parks Department.

In the past years, the past several years, the Trustees have been asked to work on things such as the alternative funding proposal. You may recall about I'll say maybe two and a half years ago there was a requirement that an Alternative Parks Funding Committee be empanelled, which the Legislature did and the report I will say is 95% done, but due to literally calendar circumstances, people shifting offices at one point, the report never got finalized. The Legislature basically that asked for it had changed its composition, the administration had changed, many of the staff had changed and so that report, I'm afraid to say, is not finished but I'm happy to say is not missing. So I'd be more than happy to recommend, and I think I dare say I think I speak for my fellow trustees that we would like to see that pursued. And the reason that's important is that it helps to do a number of things. It helps to provide flexibility and funding for the parks in the future, it provides all the interested parties, the Legislature, the County Executive, the Parks Commissioner, it gives them a chance to sort of see how we can stabilize the funding stream, the revenue stream, the expenditures for the Parks Department while providing the flexibility that Commissioner Foley and his successors will need to respond to changing situations in the park.

One of the areas that we see as crucial is the area of park fees and charges. This is something that we wrestle with every year. And when we see the document and it's 20 or 30 pages long, just because even at eight point type, you simply need that many changes to encompass all of the various circumstances, we struggle literally, I personally struggle trying to understand, do these fees represent fair charges? And that goes hand in hand with the alternative funding, because after you struggle with that issue and try to come to grips with what's fair for a senior citizen who is mobile versus a young person who's in a wheel chair versus someone who doesn't drive versus someone who does drive, someone who has an expensive hobby such as a marina, use of a marina for boating versus someone who has an inexpensive hobby such as simply going walking, you try to balance it and make sure that people are paying their fair share, they're paying their way, that different activities aren't being disproportionately subsidized. And so the question of what's fair; while it sounds plain and simple on its face, is really a difficult one. When it comes down to the nuts and bolts of fees and charges, that's an area that we struggle over, and I've used that word a few times but I want to emphasize it to try to make sure that those indeed are

fair. And I mention that it's also tied in with the Alternative Parks Funding concept.

And I promised to be brief so I'm going to go through the last couple of sections here. One of the special areas that the Trustees have worked on very, very heavily in the past is the issue of the Park Police. And the issue here isn't having Park Police, the issue is how do we build the best •• how can it be •• to use a time•worn phrase, Suffolk County Parks Department's finest?

Now, all the staff in the Parks Department is the finest, but the Park Police represent that first vanguard in any park management situation. A number of state agencies around the country have looked at the relationship between enforcement and stewardship. And they are traditionally done by separate divisions of parks departments. Recently the North Carolina Department of Parks came up with a simple statement that without enforcement, stewardship is not going to happen; enforcement compliance is the first steps towards stewardship. So while it's important to have rules that are fair, and obviously that's a predicate, it's also important to have rules that can be applied and have people to apply them fairly. And very often I know the Commissioner has •• this Commissioner and past Commissioners have recanted to us many stories where Park staff are in the position of having to enforce rules. And unfortunately part•time people or people that are not peace officers, are not trained in conflict resolution, not trained in handling irate public but are trained in perhaps finances or park management or planting trees or cleaning out swimming pools or being lifeguards are often in the position of having to enforce a rule. So the trustees have taken a strong position in the past trying to strengthen the number, the benefits that pay for County Park Police.

We've noticed that over the years when a young person has a choice of a law enforcement career, they often turn to another agency, often an agency out of state. They often turn to a town police department before they'll turn to the Suffolk County Park Police. And if you look at the history of the Suffolk County Park Police, you look at literally the turnover, you'll find that many of the departures are for higher paid police positions elsewhere in Suffolk County, as well as outside of Suffolk. Now, I know that's easier

said. The problem is, of course, like most things in government, easier stated than addressed, but that's an area where the trustees have expressed a strong interest in the past and it ties in with the larger issue of stewardship.

The final section I want to go through is the public access and equal access. This is kind of a favorite of mine, coming from a background of conservation and as a private citizen from an area of trails advocacy and simple walking, conservation, environmental education. One of the areas that I've always been puzzled by is the difficulty of getting access to tens of thousands of acres of parkland. And when I say difficulty, I don't mean it's hard to drive there; I'm pleased to say that when you drive anywhere in Suffolk County, you're likely to pass a Suffolk County parkland. The problem is where do you park, how do you get there, do you feel safe, are you welcome?

One of the areas in times of tight financial situations, the County has undertaken, properly so, a number of preservation partnerships with local municipalities, towns or villages. One of my favorite saws that I like to grind away at is the issue of when the County cooperates with a village or town or some other branch of government to produce a new parkland, it pays a certain percent, usually it's a 50/50, but when they pay a certain percent of the cost of acquisition but it's going to be managed by the local municipality as a recognition of the reality that Commissioner Foley only has so many staff people.

One of the things I really don't know if we want to see is someone from say Southold going to a park in say Bay Shore and being told, "Well, it's only for Bay Shore residents," where if it was purchased with preservation partnership funds •• we've had some recent suggestions from some folks in one neck of the woods that when events are going on there is a certain County park that they don't •• they're not allowed by the vendor's representatives there to access the park for their neighborhood purposes, walking for example. While there's other details in those stories, my point is simply that the parks are meant for all of the people who pay for them, even the people that are not born. So when they come along and they want to go for a walk or they want to use the park for one of the authorized purposes, I think that needs to be ensured. And I'm not suggesting that's a Park Police

issue or it's a staff management issue, it's really a combination of things.

And the final point I'll make, and then I'll turn to my fellow trustees for comments, is one of •• going back to an original topic I started with, the Parks Trustees try very hard not to operate in isolation. We try to stay in communication, whether it's changing our schedules to accommodate the Legislature, Legislature's meeting schedules or the committee's meeting schedules. We've tried a number of times, we're trying now for a third time to have joint yearly, they're almost yearly, nearly yearly meetings with the New York State Office of Parks Board of Commissioners •• I'm not sure what they're called. I've lost the title in my head there. But there's our analogues at New York State Parks who set policy for the State Parks region, the Long Island region, we've met with them twice over the last four years and we try to do that on a regular basis because they face many of the same problems that we face.

I mentioned earlier that •• and I was talking to the Commissioner before I started, before we started the meeting and I mentioned that during my prior tenure as chair, I attempted to attend all the Parks Committee meetings. And I will continue to do that now that I'm chair for the next year or so, and I'll try to do that to the extent my private schedule permits.

And finally, on the intergovernmental area, I think that we need to do more in terms of accommodating other people's schedules and accommodating other lines of communication, because I find personally that just literally paging through the files, I think the Real Estate Division or the Parks Department or the Planning Department or the minutes of the trustees gives me a historical perspective on things that, as the old saying goes, I don't want to repeat history by being ignorant of it, so we try to learn from the past.

So with that, I will try to stop and I guess I will turn to my right and ask Greg who told me he doesn't like public speaking, but he's here. And I'm going to give him a chance to offer some comments.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

And if you could just reintroduce yourself when you speak.

MR. DAWSON;

Thanks, Ray. Again, I'm Greg Dawson, I'm the Trustee from the Town of Islip. I'm relatively new, I was just appointed at the last •• at the last Legislative hearing. I really can't expand on too much of what Ray said, but I would like to introduce myself and let you know that I'm looking forward to working with the Legislature and my colleagues to continue to do a good job with Suffolk County Parks.

MR. FRITZ:

My name is John Fritz. I'm the Trustee from the Town of Babylon and I would just like to point out that Greg is our newest trustees and the gentleman on my left, Dick White, is our oldest trustee. So you got the whole broad spectrum here.

Before I start any of the few points I jotted down that Ray covered so eloquently, I'm just going to be very short. I would just like to say that Commissioner Foley and his staff are doing a tremendous job without •• you know, under dire circumstances. And I know the dedication a lot of these Parks people, even after they retire, they just can't seem to be get away. You have Carl out in Cupsogue and Buddy _Corwin_ , I mean, they're still involved with parks even though they've been retired for a long time.

As Ray mentioned, the funding, there was a subcommittee and they were talking about all kinds of ways to fund the parks independently of the County budget. And one of the talks was a park district, among all the other aspects of funding. It seems that raising fees all the time doesn't do the residents of Suffolk County that much benefit. In conjunction with that, the County used to have lot of people that lived in County buildings. Now, I know they weren't probably paying market value or whatever the reason was, but a lot of them have been evicted, you might say, which does disservice to the buildings and the properties where there was a presence. Now since you don't have so many Park Police to cover everything, even if you had the number of Park Police there, it still would not cover everything. A presence on the properties would be beneficial and so maybe something could be done in that aspect.

Certain activities are •• it seems that our public have plenty of parkland and many activities such as ATV's and dogs and soccer fields and everything else, there's been more pressure on the land to accommodate these groups. And I'm just wondering, is there a balance between what the County has to offer and what the town should supply such as dog runs and stuff? It seems some of the County parks, I mean, I have dogs but they should be sort of controlled so that everybody can use the park, not just the dog people who let their dogs run all over the place.

One other thing is everything is in a balance. But there is a project in a County park that is beneficial to the majority of the County residents, I have a big problem when a small vocal group can put •• can stop a project that would help most of the County •• the majority of the County residents. And I don't know, I guess that's more in your field because you're elected by the people, that you have to listen to the different Legislators when they, you know, have a problem within their district. But I think the overall residents should have a better chance of doing projects within the County parks that the local people are against.

That's all I have to say. I thank you for the opportunity and I hope that we can work together.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Thank you.

MR. BORDEN:

Miles Borden, Smithtown. I'm one of those rookies on the trustees. I think I've attended five meetings now and I still have an awful lot to learn. I'm just starting to understand this very complex parks system that our County is blessed with.

One of the things that impressed me early on was the caliber not only of the fellow trustees, but our Commissioner, his staff and the caliber of people that represent the various County departments such as Planning and the County Attorney. And you're probably aware of these folks and they certainly ought to be commended for their outstanding work and concern for

our parks.

Ray has done a great job. And I'm only going to touch on a couple of little issues that are close to me. Ray spoke about the balance, the balancing use of our parks. And while I'm a soccer fan •• I have three granddaughters, you have to be •• there is some pressure on some of our parks that really are parks that are dedicated to hiking and camping and this type of use, that to set aside large areas for soccer fields, and I think these are issues that we really have to look at very, very carefully, that we could really change the role of some of our parks if we did that. And I think some of those issues can be worked out through looking at school districts and towns and so on in terms of using a space that are available in those communities.

Another area that again Ray spoke about is Park Police. We met at Coindre Hall last month. And there are some problems there that certainly can be solved. As I was sitting there I thought, you know, some of those problems could be solved immediately if •• even on occasion if a Park Police Officer visited that park, I think there's some resolution of some of those really at almost the instant level. And certainly we all know that as Legislators, you're battling the all•mighty dollar and that's understandable. But I would certainly hope in the next year that we look at this area of policing of our parks.

Another area is that, if I understand it right, we have something like 300 historic buildings, somewhere in that vein; some of them are in very good condition, some less so. But I heard a suggestion this morning that seemed to make some sense to me, is that perhaps when we have groups in our communities that have an historical building and feel that it should be preserved and that the best direction to go is umbrella it under the County parks, you know, that's all and good. But the thought was maybe we could get some of those groups to buy into it, not only dollar wise but in terms of their volunteer help and somewhat. So that may be something that not only as Legislators but as members of •• the trustees of the parks, that we may want to give thought to and be sensitive to in the years to come.

I think I've said enough. Ray really has covered it well. And again, I certainly thank you for my appointment. And it's really an enjoyable task.

Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Thank you.

MR. WHITE:

Good morning. Dick White from the Town of East Hampton. I actually live in Montauk. I have attended •• since I was first appointed in 1970, my appointment letter came from H. Lee Dennison and there was only one picture on the wall in those days.

I have very little to add to my colleagues. However, one important thing is we have been very, very aggressive in acquiring land and not so aggressive in backing up that acquisition with money to maintain and protect and develop the properties for which they were acquired. And for this we need a lot of help from you folks. And that's about it. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Thank you. Thank you very much.

LEG. ALDEN:

Mr. Chairman, can we get them to repeat the remarks about the dog runs? Were you listening, Jon?

LEG. COOPER:

I'll read it in the minutes.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

We'll get the minutes.

LEG. ALDEN:

Okay.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Thank you all for your thoughts. In listening to you, it seems like one of the important issues, and I tend to agree, is purchasing these historical homes or these pieces of property that have homes or buildings on them and then

just leaving them abandoned, so to speak. And that does sound like that's a problem that we need to start working on. Because even if there's just a live body there taking care of a building or a building, it shows that there's life there. There's less chance of, I would say, a lot less chance of problems, and that's something that we're going to start looking into.

And also, I think that it sounds like Commissioner Foley has done a wonderful job because it sounds like all of you are very impressed. Thank you, Commissioner. The •• well, let me put this out for some questions. Did you have a question?

LEG. ALDEN:

It's really a comment.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Yes.

LEG. ALDEN:

A point was made, and I think by a number of the trustees, about the fact that policing could be a lot more than what we have. And basically, Dick would probably remember when we had a police force that was probably about ten times the size of what we have now. And that was with a lot less property and a lot less parks. So I pointed out at the end of the year, and I think that I had at least one conversation with the new Presiding Officer and at least one with the County Executive's Office, that we have a requirement that's on the books right now for "X" amount of acres we have to have X number of police officers and we are woefully in disregard of that law. And either we have to change that law or we have to bring our police staff up to complete staffing levels. And that's one of the things that we probably should schedule on the agenda here and just discuss what the alternatives would be, whether we wanted to, you know, just knock that law out or start to hire more police to come into compliance with the law.

That's what I've seen as far as •• you know, you guys have touched on, you know, I think the very pressing and important issues. And I want to compliment you on your service. I've been to a number of Parks Committee meetings and I'm impressed with your dedication and I know you take time

out from your lives to come in there and put in a lot of work on these things, so thank you.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

I believe Legislator Lindsay had a comment on this; is that all right with you?

LEG. ALDEN:

Sure.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Legislator Lindsay.

P.O. LINDSAY:

Oh, I can wait.

LEG. VILORIA•FISHER:

No, if it's a response, go ahead.

P.O. LINDSAY:

It isn't really a response, and we don't disagree, myself and Legislator Alden. And I think really it comes back on us. We're always in •• we face something that you gentlemen should understand. At times we're under a lot of pressure to preserve more and more property and we really should take pause before moving forward. Maybe if we made one less acquisition and hired some more Park Police to maintain that acquisition, or if it isn't police per se but if it's, you know, laborers that do the Stewardship Program or something like that.

I think we should keep that in mind moving forward, that when we do move forward to preserve or to create another park, that we should make sure that we have also the resources to maintain that acquisition or develop that park. And I'm in full agreement with that.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Thank you, Legislator Lindsay. Legislator Viloria•Fisher.

LEG. VILORIA • FISHER:

Good morning, gentlemen. As some of you who were trustees when I was Parks Chair know, it was one of my distinct pleasures to attend the Park Trustees meeting. I was always impressed by how well informed the trustees were and how dedicated. And so I want to compliment you and welcome the new members on board.

I have a question for you, Ray, regarding the alternative funding report. What is needed in order to help that move forward at this point? Because I turned to Legislator Alden and I said, "Oh my goodness, you know, I forget about that, it just fell off the radar screen."

MR. CORWIN:

Yes, it did. And it's really •• it's not attributable to any one person. It was literally a set of calendar circumstances and office holders changing positions. What is probably needed is two or three more meetings of the committee. At one point, I had a member of my staff from work helping with a report. And he was there for about two years and after about a year •and•a•half, after the committee ceased functioning, he finally handed me the report as he went to a new job and said, "If it ever comes back to life, here it is." So I literally have the draft report on a commuter disk. It's a question really of getting everyone refamiliarized with the content, the issues; it's been a while. It's been I'll say •• I want to say two years, I don't know if that sounds right.

LEG. VILORIA • FISHER:

It sounds right to me, yeah, it seems a while.

MR. CORWIN:

Yeah, probably around '04, somewhere around early '04.

LEG. VILORIA • FISHER:

Ray, is there a full compliment?

MR. CORWIN:

What's that?

LEG. VILORIA•FISHER:

Is the committee complete, is there a full compliment of the committee?

MR. CORWIN:

I would ••

LEG. VILORIA•FISHER:

Or have some members dropped off because they might have been Legislators who are no longer •• •

MR. CORWIN:

That's right.

LEG. VILORIA•FISHER:

•• serving?

MR. CORWIN:

There were some people that were there by virtue of ex•officio roles that they held. And they're not in those roles anymore so they're not there.

LEG. VILORIA•FISHER:

Maybe you could let us know who is on the committee ••

MR. CORWIN:

I'd be happy to do that.

LEG. VILORIA•FISHER:

•• who is still serving, what gaps there are ••

MR. CORWIN:

Sure.

LEG. VILORIA•FISHER:

•• so that we could bring it back to its full compliment and that way you'll have a committee to review the work that you've already done, because I

know you worked hard on that.

MR. CORWIN:

Yes. And I'll be happy to do that. I'll provide the committee with the information I have. It would require, I suspect, a reauthorization technically by the Legislature to reconvene the committee.

LEG. VILORIA•FISHER:

Was there a deadline in the legislation, if you recall?

MR. CORWIN:

There was a deadline which escapes me, I want to say December 31, '03, but don't quote me on that, I'd have to check.

LEG. VILORIA•FISHER:

Okay. Okay, thank you for bringing that to our attention.

MR. CORWIN:

I guess what I would emphasize there is it's not so much •• it's not there we're •• understand that we're often committed to death; I'm not necessarily looking for a committee per se, we're really •• the point that the trustees are trying to make is that it's the concept of alternative funding, however it's explored, and the committee was the mechanism the Leg chose some time ago and I'm suggesting that might be the best way to go.

LEG. VILORIA•FISHER:

Thank you. And stewardship has always been ••

MR. CORWIN:

And if there's other mechanisms, we're open to that.

LEG. VILORIA•FISHER:

From the time in 1999 when I first took office and I had a voluntary stewardship program that I introduced because we saw that ratio changing. The number of acres that we owned was going up and the number of Park Police and park workers that we had was going down. So it was going in inverse proportion which wasn't a good idea, so stewardship is something

very important to all of us here. And as I believe Mr. Borden said, we're always faced with the fiscal impediments that keep us from doing what we need to do, but we do need to do this, we need to protect our parklands. Thank you for being here.

MR. CORWIN:

Thanks for the invitation.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

I just wanted to ask one question, maybe if you know right offhand because you did speak to the issue of reasonable, fair and equitable park fees and charges. What does it cost to get, I guess, a car, to have a car go in to Smith Point?

MR. CORWIN:

I will turn to the Commissioner because I'm sure I'll get that wrong.

LEG. VILORIA • FISHER:

I guess we should wait to ask those specific questions.

MR. CORWIN:

This is a quiz for the Commissioner, I believe.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Yeah, I'm just curious what it is.

COMMISSIONER FOLEY:

For a regular resident it's \$5, then non•residents pay double that. And there are variety of discounts that sometimes make it free or a reduced rate.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Okay. I was just curious about that. Thank you, Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER FOLEY:

Okay, yep.

MR. CORWIN:

If I may along those lines, the Commissioner said a phrase that struck a cord. On at least three occasions recently that I recall, trustees have had a fairly long discussion about the issue of discounts on fees. And I would be the last person to stand up and suggest that any group does not deserve a discount. I would suggest, though, that it is getting somewhat confusing for Parks to sort of implement that and it's becoming sort of a crazy, quote, landscape of discounts of what magnitude for what group under what conditions at what parks. And to some extent, while not wanting to take away any entitlements from any group that currently has a discount, it needs to sort of be smoothed out a little bit. And if I was Solomon I'd give you a solution, but I'm not.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Legislator Browning.

LEG. BROWNING:

Yeah, while talking about discounts for various groups and people, one of my questions was as I remember Commissioner Foley talking about discounts for active duty military for the parks, I know that Federal parks, veterans themselves can get in free to various parks. Also in the State. I believe now the State has just changed that. Have you guys talked about possibly doing that for veterans on the County level?

MR. CORWIN:

We have not talked about what the other branches of government might be doing on that. That would be informative to us to know that. I was not aware of any recent actions by the State.

We have talked recently about a couple of bills that were introduced some time in the past year I'd say. And I've confessed, I'm drawing a blank as to what groups they dealt with. It may have been veterans or it may have been radio volunteers or different kinds of emergency volunteers. And there was some confusion in the trustees about whether •• where does one draw the line. Not that the people that were being proposed for inclusion or coverage by that bill were not worthy, you know. Just as a point of

discussion, I would stipulate suppose they are; what then •• how then do you explain where you stop drawing that line? You know, one person who's an active volunteer in casual conversation said to me, "You know, there are volunteers and there are volunteers. There are some people that spend hours and hours and hours a week and you have other people that maybe are technically in that same volunteer category and maybe do something once a month." I mean, one doesn't want to split hairs about other people's lives, but it is a difficult, very Solomon•like task to say, "If you give it to group A, B, C because they're volunteers of a certain type but not to D, E and F, where do you stop drawing the line? The people in that first group not covered are going to obviously ask the question, why does the line stop there?

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Does anybody else have any other questions; yes?

MR. BORDEN:

Yes, I'd just like to make a comment about foregoing a land acquisition to replace police officers or to increase the police officers. And I think our land is running out fast. And if there's an opportunity to buy a good piece of land I think that should take priority, even though the stewardship is also a major criteria.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Are there any other questions? Well again, we would like to thank you very, very much not only for coming down here today, but more importantly to spend your time as Trustees for the Parks and Recreation and Conservation Committee. It's a very important job. Our beautiful parks in Suffolk County are something we're very proud of and what you're doing is important to every one of us in Suffolk County.

Again, your time is precious to all of you and we thank you for it.

MR. CORWIN:

Right. And thank you again for the invitation.

MR. BORDEN:

Thank you.

MR. CORWIN:

We look forward to working with you this year.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Thank you.

LEG. ALDEN:

And as a steward, I might be willing to move in to one of the County buildings, if it's a suitable size.

LEG. COOPER:

And it befits your office.

LEG. ALDEN:

Yeah, I could use part of it for my office.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

That might be a good idea, offices, town offices, County offices. Thank you very much.

LEG. VILORIA • FISHER:

What a thought. I don't think there's any building in my district that's in a park, though.

LEG. COOPER:

Actually, the predecessor had an office in Coindre Hall for ••

LEG. VILORIA • FISHER:

That's right, Hackeling; he did have ••

LEG. ALDEN:

He didn't go to the office.

LEG. VILORIA • FISHER:

When he had a special meeting he did, remember?

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Commissioner, do you want to come up here? I don't know if anybody ••

LEG. VILORIA•FISHER:

Yeah, I have a question for him about what they talked about.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

•• needs to talk to the Commissioner, have any questions for the Commissioner.

LEG. VILORIA•FISHER:

Yes, I have a question.

COMMISSIONER FOLEY:

Good afternoon.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Good afternoon. Legislator Viloria•Fisher is chomping at the bit here with a question.

LEG. VILORIA•FISHER:

Yes. It was something that was alluded to by some of the trustees and I think that you would be the one with the answer to that. The rentals, we had difficulty with it, The Friends were handling it, The Friends are no longer contracting with us, so what mechanism has been put in place to move forward with that? Because as we know, having those eyes on our very precious properties, our eyes and ears and having a presence is a deterrent to vandalism and other issues. So how are we moving on that?

COMMISSIONER FOLEY:

I believe it was 2002, the Legislature adopted a resolution directing us to get fair market appraisals of the rental value for those properties. That process has been completed. We have not, however, changed the rents based on those appraisals. We are trying to, in all honesty, figure out the rental rate between what it is now, which is an economy rate, and those appraisals that will not empty out all those houses because the change would be so dramatic.

That same piece of legislation requires us to come back to the Legislature every time we want to fill a vacancy. The result has been that we have several vacant properties, residences now. It also means that if we want to fill in quickly, we really don't have any mechanism other than coming to the Legislature and going through the process to get you to approve the candidate we want to put in the house.

The same legislation sets out a priority of who will be considered to live in those houses. In some cases it's fine, in others, when we finally do get back to you with a recommendation, we're going to disagree with those priorities. We don't think it should always be a police officer first. Sometimes it should be the Parks Supervisor who is essentially on call at that park 24•hours day. That may serve the public better than a police officer. So we're trying to figure this all out and come back with some fair and equitable way to approach fair market rents and recognize the value of having park people in those houses, people who are familiar and can provide a service to the public who enjoy that park or use that park. And I apologize for the delay, but it's one among things that we've been trying to get up•to •date.

LEG. VILORIA•FISHER:

I just wanted to follow up with another question. Commissioner Foley, I can't remember all of the details of that legislation, but I thought I remembered that we looked at the market value and then provided some kind of economy because the person was doing •• no, it's just straight market value.

COMMISSIONER FOLEY:

Well, you directed us to get the appraisals done.

LEG. VILORIA•FISHER:

Right.

COMMISSIONER FOLEY:

Which we have done.

LEG. VILORIA • FISHER:

Right.

COMMISSIONER FOLEY:

And I don't remember the details either, I think it was 1250•2002 was the resolution number. But we have to come back to you every time we want to fill a vacancy and make a justification for the rent we're recommending. You didn't say in the legislation ••

LEG. VILORIA • FISHER:

Oh, you don't have to charge the market rate? You can recommend a rent level.

COMMISSIONER FOLEY:

I believe that's true.

LEG. VILORIA • FISHER:

Okay, that's what I thought I recalled from that. I didn't think we had to charge a straight market rate because it makes sense to provide some kind of discount because there is a service to the County in someone living there.

COMMISSIONER FOLEY:

And we're trying •• now trying to come up with a means of evaluating the value of that person, whether it's a police officer or a park worker or someone else, to come back to you and say, "Here's an intelligent basis for discontinuing from that market rent."

LEG. VILORIA • FISHER:

Okay, I see. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Thank you, Commissioner. And I just wanted to also thank you for getting back to me on the amount of green fee •• is it green key? Green key cards that are out. And I will be studying that and trying to think of a way maybe to do a pilot program on that where I mentioned that possibly we could send out notices when green key cards had expired, just to see maybe more

people would apply for them, although we do have lot out there. But I'll be digesting that, thank you.

COMMISSIONER FOLEY:

Okay. We're working on a number of things with this new reservation system that were not possible on the old one ••

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Right.

COMMISSIONER FOLEY:

•• that may provide an answer to your question.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Yes. Does anybody else have any questions for the Commissioner?
Okay. If not, we are going to go to the agenda.

COMMISSIONER FOLEY:

Okay.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

That was painless, right? Commissioner, come back.

LEG. VILORIA • FISHER:

Commissioner, we need you for the agenda.

COMMISSIONER FOLEY:

Okay.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Oh, these are the Capital Budget and things. Do you have any comments you would like to share with us on the Introductory Resolutions that are before us today?

COMMISSIONER FOLEY:

Well, as the Legislator and I have discussed, the concept that's being put forward in those resolutions is important. It's something we need. I think we need an opportunity to, again, match up our security needs and our accountability need with this new reservation system, make sure we spend the money in the right places. So I agree with the concept and support it, we may have to work on the details.

LEG. ALDEN:

And that's what I was going to say on both of these. I have the intention of tabling both of them because I'm in conversation with the Commissioner and also with the County Executive, so.

Introductory Resolutions

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

All right. So ***Introductory Resolution 1077•06 (Amending the 2006 Capital Budget and Program and appropriating funds in connection with the installation of cash control and security at Suffolk County Parks Facilities)***. I have a motion to table by Legislature Alden.

LEG. COOPER:

Second.

LEG. NOWICK:

Second by Legislator Cooper. All in favor? Opposed?
1077 is tabled (Vote: 5•0•0•0).

1078•06 (Amending the 2006 Capital Budget and Program and appropriating funds in connection with a cash control pilot program at the Suffolk County West Sayville Golf Course).

LEG. ALDEN:

Motion to table.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Motion to table by Legislator Alden, same second by Legislator Cooper. All in favor? Opposed? ***1078 has been tabled (Vote: 5•0•0•0).***

If there are no other issues, I make a motion to adjourn.

LEG. VILORIA•FISHER:

Second.

CHAIRPERSON NOWICK:

Second by Legislator Viloría•Fisher.

(* THE MEETING CONCLUDED AT 12:34 PM*)

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